

# ARIZONA Planning Bulletin



Statewide Land Use Plan  
Amendment for Fire and Fuels Management

Bureau of Land Management

May 2003, Vol. 2

## Public Open Houses Held

In this, the second Planning Bulletin on the planning process to amend BLM's seven Land Use Plans (LUP) for fire, fuels and air quality, we are providing information on the March public meetings and additional details on the LUP amendments.

In March, we conducted eight open house meetings in Phoenix, Safford, Tucson, Flagstaff, Yuma, Lake Havasu City, Kingman, and St. George, Utah (the location of the BLM Arizona Strip Field Office). These meetings were announced in our first Planning Bulletin, mailed in February 2003 to more than 3,500 individuals and organizations throughout the state. News releases were issued to state and local media, and legal notices were placed in most major newspapers.

At the meeting, each attendee had the opportunity to view exhibits, review project information, and talk in-depth with planning staff. Many residents took full advantage of the opportunity and spent more than two hours talking with project team members.

Attendees were also given a comment sheet. All comments gathered during the meetings were read and evaluated. All issues will be addressed and considered by BLM equally throughout the planning process, with no preference or emphasis placed upon the number of comments assigned to any particular issue.

This second Planning Bulletin includes a summary of the comments we received from you. The comments illustrate the diverse opinions we received. BLM recognizes that your time is important, and we thank community members who took the time to visit one of the open houses and provide comments to us.

Also enclosed with this Planning Bulletin is information on BLM's preliminary Desired Future Conditions and Management Actions for fire and fuels management as well as a brief discussion of Endangered Species Act (ESA) compliance for the proposed amendments.

Please review the comments from the public meetings and the preliminary LUP amendment information. Please send us your comments on the enclosed comment sheet. Your voice is important in helping to guide our planning effort and will provide the foundation upon which we will formulate a range of alternative strategies for managing fire across Arizona's diverse landscape.

We look forward to hearing from you.

# Public Comments Received at Open House Meetings

During the weeks of March 3 and 10, 2003, BLM conducted open house meetings in Phoenix, Safford, Tucson, Flagstaff, Yuma, Lake Havasu City, Kingman, and St. George, Utah. The meetings were held to inform the public about this planning effort and gather information on future fire management activities on BLM-administered lands. The open house meetings also asked the public what they value about the public lands and wildland fire management. The following are the questions, issues, or concerns expressed by attendees at these meetings and/or submitted on comment sheets.

## GENERAL COMMENTS

- Open forum meetings are an excellent format.
- BLM should develop fire use areas adjacent to those already developed and managed by the Forest Service.
- Will the LUP amendments consider how fire will be managed within the National Monuments?
- What is the role of The Nature Conservancy?

## PRESCRIBED BURNS

- Using fire to manage ecosystems is a good idea, including using prescribed fires to improve resources.
- We support BLM taking proactive measures to incorporate wildland fire management into its land use plans.

## NATURALLY IGNITED FIRES

- Allow naturally-occurring fire cycles with minimal suppression efforts.
- Use agency resources to control or limit the size of fires rather than outright suppression.

## WILDLAND URBAN INTERFACE (WUI)

- There is great concern about WUI fires.
- The government should not expend money to protect private property in rural areas that are highly susceptible to wildfire.

## HAZARDOUS FUELS TREATMENT

- Past suppression practices have led to high levels of hazardous fuels resulting in more catastrophic fires.
- We are concerned that big trees will be logged, that BLM's proposed action will be an excuse for doing more than what is really needed to reduce the risk of wildland fire, such as clearing out large parcels of land.
- Firebreaks and clear cuts are an appropriate management tool.
- Fuels reduction should be conducted based on sound ecological principles and not by for-profit timber interests.
- Use fire to remove or reduce the presence of invasive species such as tamarisk.

## CULTURAL RESOURCES

- Fire is the single greatest threat to organic components of cultural, archaeological, and historical resources. The Amendments to the Land Use Plans should ensure that historically and culturally valuable sites are identified, documented, and protected from fire.

## AIR AND WATER QUALITY

- BLM must adequately address the environmental consequences of their fire management actions.
- BLM shouldn't undertake burns that will affect air quality during hunting season.
- Air quality monitoring should be subcontracted to private businesses.

## FIRE AND LIVESTOCK GRAZING

- How will BLM fire management affect specific livestock grazing permits?
- Prescribed burns or allowing naturally ignited fires to burn may have at least a short-term effect on livestock forage availability.
- Fire management plans should not eliminate livestock grazing, as to do so would take a grave toll on the health of public lands and wildlife.

# Preliminary LUP Amendment and Proposed Action

The proposed action is to amend BLM's seven existing LUPs to more adequately integrate fire management direction for public lands managed by the BLM. The LUP Amendments would establish framework decisions for **Desired Future Conditions** and **Management Actions** for fire and fuels management. The LUP Amendments would include fire and other treatments as tools to achieve resource management objectives. Fire management in the amended LUPs would include adaptive management for wildfire; allow fire to resume a more natural ecological role within each ecosystem; the use of prescribed fire; and mechanical, chemical or biological treatments to meet resource objectives and reduce hazardous fuels on public lands inside and outside Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) areas.

The **Desired Future Conditions** would re-establish fire as a natural process in fire-adapted ecosystems, and fire would be used to achieve objectives for other resources. As such, the desired future conditions would establish four categories of fire management for all BLM-administered public lands:

**Category A: *Areas where fire is not desired at all.*** This category includes areas where mitigation and suppression are required to prevent direct threats to life or property. It also includes areas where fire never played a large role historically in the development and maintenance of the ecosystem, and some areas where fire return intervals were very long.

**Category B: *Areas where unplanned wildfire is not desired because of current conditions.*** These are ecosystems (including some WUI areas) where an unplanned ignition could have negative effects unless/until some form of mitigation takes place.

**Category C: *Areas where wildland fire is desired, but there are significant constraints that must be considered for its use.*** Areas where significant ecological, social or political constraints (such as air quality, threatened and endangered species, or wildlife habitat considerations) limit wildland fire.

**Category D: *Areas where wildland fire is desired, and there are few or no constraints for its use.*** Areas where unplanned and planned wildfire may be used to achieve desired objectives such as to improve vegetation, wildlife habitat or watershed conditions.

Field Office level Fire Management Plans will designate BLM-administered lands as Category A, B., C or D. Category designations will change over time as fuel loads and conditions change.

Preliminary **Management Actions** pertaining to fire and fuels management have been developed:

- In Category A areas, BLM will implement programs to reduce unwanted ignitions, and emphasize prevention, detection, and rapid suppression response techniques.
- In Category A areas where fuel loading is high, BLM will utilize biological, mechanical or chemical treatments (but not fire) to maintain non-hazardous levels of fuels.
- In Category B and C areas where fuel loading is high and conditions are not suitable for fire, BLM will emphasize prevention and mitigation programs to reduce unwanted fire ignitions, and use mechanical, biological or chemical treatments to mitigate the fuel loadings or meet resource objectives.
- In Category B and C areas where conditions may be suitable for fire, BLM will utilize prescribed fire and a combination of biological, mechanical or chemical treatments to maintain non-hazardous levels of fuels, reduce the hazardous effects of unplanned wildland fires and meet resource objectives.
- In Category C areas where conditions are suitable for fire, BLM will emphasize prescribed fire and allow naturally ignited wildland fire to achieve resource objectives.
- In Category D areas, BLM will minimize fire suppression activities, and minimize biological, mechanical, and chemical fuel treatments.
- In Category D areas, BLM will emphasize prescribed fire and naturally ignited fires to achieve resource objectives.

The LUP amendments will also identify general restrictions on fire management practices to protect other resource values, and establish guidelines for the emergency stabilization and rehabilitation of areas burned by wildfire and the ecological rehabilitation of hazardous fuels treatment sites.

## Endangered Species Act (ESA) Section 7 Compliance

As part of BLM's proposed Statewide LUP Amendment for fire, fuels and air quality, BLM started ESA Section 7 informal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on potential impacts to federally listed, proposed, and candidate species, and designated or proposed critical habitat. In April 2003, BLM and USFWS finalized a Consultation Agreement to establish an effective and cooperative ESA Section 7 consultation process. The Agreement defines the process, products, actions, schedule, and expectations of the BLM and USFWS regarding project consultation. The Agreement also considers effects to, and management for, candidate species. One Biological Evaluation (BE) will be prepared to determine the effect of the Proposed Action on all relevant listed, proposed, and candidate species, and associated critical habitat. All anticipated environmental effects, conservation actions, mitigation, and monitoring will be disclosed in the BE. This includes analysis of all direct and indirect effects of the Proposed Action, including any interrelated and interdependent actions. A finalized species list, action area, and agreement on level of detail for species analysis is now being prepared. BLM plans to submit its final BE to the USFWS and begin Formal Section 7 Consultation in August 2003.

### What is the Next Step?

In the next few weeks, BLM's planning team will further develop alternatives for managing fire, fuels and mechanical treatments on BLM lands in Arizona. These strategies will be based on those outlined on page three of this Planning Bulletin, taking into account your comments and those of other stakeholding groups. The planning team will also seek your input through possible additional public meetings, and will review the planning criteria to ensure decision-making is tailored to the issues pertinent to the planning effort and to ensure that we avoid unnecessary or repetitious data collection and analysis.

The next Planning Bulletin is scheduled for publication this summer, and will include information on the BE being prepared for compliance with the ESA, and on the Environmental Assessment. Please complete the enclosed, postage paid comment sheet on the proposed LUP amendments.

### For More Information on the LUP Amendment Process:

Updated information on the LUP Amendment and environmental assessment process will be posted on the BLM Arizona State Offices Internet site at: [www.az.blm.gov](http://www.az.blm.gov). You can also send your questions or comments via e-mail to: [AZ\\_STATEWIDE\\_LUP@blm.gov](mailto:AZ_STATEWIDE_LUP@blm.gov)

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